

I am pleased to mark the 63rd anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel, known as Yom Haatzmaut.

The history of the State of Israel is filled with stories of perseverance and overcoming impossible odds. For its entire existence, Israel has served as an example of democracy and freedom. Though they have faced many trials and tribulations, the people of Israel have demonstrated their resilience and courage in the face of ever-present threats, and have managed to build a high-tech, tolerant, and vibrant democratic society out of the desert sands.

This week, we also mark Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day. The day preceding Independence Day is marked with solemn observances for the 22,867 soldiers who gave their lives in defense of the Israeli people, and the 3,971 individuals who lost their lives from acts of terror. In an incredible act of national solitude, the entire nation pauses to observe moments of silence, stopping even while driving on the highway to stand in silent honor for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

I have always admired the Jewish tradition of recognizing joy in times of sadness and sadness in times of joy. Yom Hazikaron's somber end precedes the beginning of the joyous Yom Haatzmaut, Independence Day. I have been to Israel 14 times and, every time I go, I encounter ordinary citizens and government officials alike who are genuinely dedicated to living up to the cherished ideals declared on Israel's Independence Day in 1948.

On this day, we join with Israel in celebrating its Independence Day, and look forward to marking many more celebrations in the years to come with peace and security, and with freedom realized for all those who live within and around Israel's borders.